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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4089
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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 7471
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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 2292
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 3384
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 002759

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

SIPDIS
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: OPRC KMDR IS

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Major media reported that Israel has given a German mediator its response to Hamas demands involving the release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the return of Gilad Shalit. The Israeli response will supposedly be relayed to Hamas today. The top-level marathon meetings of Israeli ministers ended shortly after midnight

without an announcement of a decision over whether the Qforum of seven,^Q comprising PM Netanyahu and six other senior cabinet ministers, had decided to accept or reject Hamas' offer. The media reported that the Government of Israel is bound to accept a deal to return Shalit, but under some conditions. HaQaretz and other leading media reported that Israel would like to see most of the Palestinian prisoners from the West Bank, especially those considered the most dangerous, expelled to Gaza or abroad. A Hamas source told the leading news Web site Ynet today that the latest Israeli move may hold up the entire process for some time. The source was quoted as saying that Hamas had been expecting an "Israeli ploy" in which conditions would be stipulated in the last minute. The source said: "We are still waiting to receive the official Israeli decision, but as we have said, for the deal to go through, Israel must accept all of our demands. "If this condition is not met and the number of deportees reduced to near zero, there will be no deal," the Hamas source said. However, Ynet said that Hamas is unlikely to drop out of negotiations, as it also has much interest in the execution of the deal. The Jerusalem Post reported that, alarmed by the possibility that a prisoner exchange agreement will bolster Hamas^Q popularity among Palestinians, Fatah has stepped up its measures against the movement^Qs leading figures and members in the West Bank.

Alongwith manifestations of support for the deal outsid PM Netanyahu^Qs Jerusalem office, such as picturs of Shalit mounted on multiple cardboard placars, the media reported on protests highlighting te possible danger posed by released terrorists.

Israel Radio reported that France intends to host aone-day Middle East peace conference next month, including Israel, the PA, Egypt, and the Quartet members. The radio reported that none of the sides has objected to taking part in the meeting.

The Jerusalem Post reported that several heads of hesder yeshivas (which combine military service and religious studies) that they were dissatisfied with the overly conciliatory message that went out from Sunday^Qs meeting of yeshiva heads. Yediot reported that a yeshiva in Arad has abandoned the hesder arrangement. Its head, Rabbi Yinon Ilani, was quoted as saying that the Israeli establishment is not the pertinent authority. Media reported that reservists have hanged banners in support of the Har Bracha Yeshiva, which DM Ehud Barak has removed from the hesder arrangement.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the White House announced yesterday that President Obama has signed a defense spending bill that includes \$202 million in funds for Israel^Qs missile defense programs. However, the appropriation does not contain funding for the F-22 aircraft.

HaQaretz cited research by two Israel Prize laureates -- Ruth Lapidoth and Dr. Ofra Friesel -- that Israel is unreservedly bound to the Roadmap.

The Web sites of HaQaretz and The Jerusalem Post quoted the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) as saying yesterday that former U.S. President Jimmy Carter has apologized to the American Jewish community for 'stigmatizing Israel' and asked for forgiveness for his actions. "We must recognize Israel's achievements under difficult circumstances, even as we strive in a positive way to help Israel continue to improve its relations with its Arab populations, but we must not permit criticisms for improvement to stigmatize Israel," Carter wrote in a letter to the JTA. "As I would have noted at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but which is appropriate at any time of the year, I offer an Al Het for any words or deeds of mine that may have done so," Carter wrote, referring to the prayer said on Yom Kippur in which Jews ask God for forgiveness for any sins.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Mayor Nir Barkat has told Jerusalem Municipality legal adviser Yossi Habilio that he does not want him to represent the city in a High Court petition demanding the cancellation of controversial plans by architect Moshe Safdie for the Silwan neighborhood, south of the Old City. The petitioners reported that Safdie, who was commissioned by the previous administration of Uri Lupolianski in 2007, also received payment of \$82,900 from the right-wing Elad organization, which seeks to expand

the Jewish presence in Silwan through settlement and tourism.

The Jerusalem Post reported that last month an immigrant American teenager underwent a dubious arrest and was subsequently badly beaten up by inmates.

All media reported that archeologists have uncovered a Jewish house in Nazareth dating to the time of Jesus.

The media reported on the passing of President Obama's healthcare reform in the U.S. Senate. Maariv says that this is the President's first achievement.

Yediot reported that the State Department has warned American tourists about the behavior of Israeli drivers. The State Department also allegedly warns that the personal computers of American visitors may be checked for security purposes, and that they may get them back broken or not get them at all. The report cites the State Department's Country-Specific Information on Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza on travel.state.gov, last updated in June 2009.

Mideast:

Block Quotes:

II. QEnd the Indecision

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (12/22): QInfuriatingly, the agonizing deliberations [over Gilad Shalit's release] are taking place three and a half years too late.... The cabinet will not be able to wash its hands of responsibility with the spurious claim that it has Qdone everythingQ to obtain Shalit's release. True, it clamped a cruel blockade on Gaza as a means of applying pressure, but the heavy price of that is paid by the Gazans, not Hamas. The massive military operation in Gaza did nothing to advance his release, and in the end Israel had to return to negotiations. Not a single new reason that justifies keeping the Shalits and the Israeli public in suspense -- and jeopardizing Shalit's life -- has been added to the sum total of security and political considerations. Israel's security does not depend on whether another 10 or 20 terrorists are freed. Israel's prestige is not measured only by its ability to combat terrorism, and its failure is not a function of the roars of triumph with which Hamas will welcome its freed prisoners. Gilad Shalit, who could have been free a long time ago, must come home now.

II. QThe Fateful Decision

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/22): QBeyond the moral bankruptcy of rewarding past evil, with history as our guide -- and with heavy hearts -- we assert that Israelis will die if the government obtains Gilad's freedom by acting only with its heart.... Stopping on a dime will mean that the pundits and politicians who orchestrated the campaign [to release Gilad Shalit] that took matters this far will have some explaining to do. If Netanyahu does pull back, it will be because Israelis were bluffing ourselves as much as we were bluffing Hamas. A QnoQ now would take Hamas down a peg. Netanyahu could directly address the Islamists' disappointed constituents, emphasizing that meeting Hamas's rapacious demands would have dishonored him and caused Israel to lose face. Palestinians will understand that. So will Israelis. He should frankly acknowledge that he was ready for an honorable deal. Indeed, he must stress that he remains ready for an honorable deal. The harrowing ordeal of Gilad's selfless parents touches us all. Their son has become our son. Nevertheless, Netanyahu must

reverse course. The killers should remain incarcerated; if they don't, more Israelis will surely die.

III. Netanyahu Already Thinking Ahead

Diplomatic correspondent and television anchor Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (12/22): QWhichever way [Benjamin Netanyahu] decides, he is torn -- truly torn. All his life he made a career out of preaching morality to those who Qcapitulated to terror,Q and now he is about to be the first among the capitulators.

He is surrounded by people opposed to the deal.... Oh, what passionate speeches he would have made against the Shalit deal, if he were the leader of the opposition.... In the end, his aides believe, he will go for it. ItQs hard to believe that this will happen either today or tomorrow. He will drive us, and himself, crazy, a little bit longer. And perhaps even longer.... Netanyahu doesnQt rest for a moment, his troubled soul can find no solace, he sleeps little, tortures himself a lot. That is how he looks, that is also how he feels, and all this over a deal for the release of one prisoner. ItQs interesting what will happen when the Iranian matter is on the agenda.

IV. QItQs All Talk

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, opined in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/22): QAt the very very end, after all the deliberation (and mainly, the reports about the deliberation) the bargaining, the tough negotiations, Israel will pay a high price, more or less, for the safe return of Gilad Shalit. The problem is that the current prime minister has preached for years for taking a tenacious and firm position, with gritted teeth and a commando knife between the teeth, against terror organizations. And now, oops, for the third time, he finds himself facing a dismal reality: the first time was when, to his dismay, he spoke about Qtwo states for two peoples,Q the second time was when, to his horror, he spoke about a construction freeze and now -- the terrible deal. Bibi Netanyahu tosses and turns on his bed at night and dreams of Arrow missiles that are gratuitous in a war of this kind, of thousands of tanks, of nuclear facilities that we are said to have. What use are all these in the war over the life of Gilad Shalit? For decades, we have trapped ourselves into the present situation. All Israeli governments lent a hand to swapping murderers for our prisoners at excessive dosages, never symmetrically. Suddenly now, today, we are trying to change the rules and it isnQt working too well. We are facing an enemy of unparalleled cruelty -- the kind of enemy that can do what it wants. That can hurt Shalit. QThatQs not possible, you say, Qwe have a tape: he is alive, he is alive, he is alive. Nonsense and folly.... These words are being written before the forum of seven ends its deliberations. It may be that the negotiations will continue, that they will try to get something more. That they will postpone deciding. That they will bow their heads to the German mediator and beg him to keep going a little more. We should foster no illusions: the deal will get under way and its price will be unbearably heavy.

IV. QChange in Gaza Is Possible

Gershon Baskin, Co-Director of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (12/22): QI say to [West Bank Palestinians I meet]: if you want to end the occupation and liberate your land and create your state next to Israel, go and meet with Israelis from Likud and from Israel Beiteinu, don't boycott them -- that has no logic to it at all. So I say to the [Israeli] government, if we want to change the regime in Gaza without reoccupying it, we must change the hearts and the minds of the Gazan people.... Israel's current policy is not only not working, it is counterproductive and it is morally wrong. Collective punishment against a civilian population will never create future partners for peace. If we want to weaken Hamas, end the economic siege. If we want to bankrupt Hamas economically, open the passages for trade -- it will put the tunnels out of business. If we want to build partners for peace, enable thousands of Gazans to come out to meet with Israelis. If we want change in Gaza, we have to change the way we treat Gaza. Hamas is the enemy; the people of Gaza are not.